

Greetings Gold Families!

We hope the start of the new year is going well for you, and that you're staying healthy!

Team Announcements

Passion Projects:

We will be kicking off an exciting new team project next week that encourages students to pursue their passions. This is based off the "Google 20% time" initiative that allows Google employees to use 20% of their work time to pursue pet projects that are intrinsically motivating to them, as long as it benefits the company in some way. Students will be given the time and autonomy to learn about something new that interests them. Some student ideas have included computer coding, writing a book, playing a new instrument, song writing, fashion design, astronomy, drawing, photography, etc.

Students will be given time occasionally throughout the remainder of the year to complete this project. While the topics will vary quite a bit, all projects will have the same four elements:

1. It must have an open-ended driving question.
2. It must be researched.
3. It must have a final product.
4. It must be shared in some way.

The course registration process is coming up! During the week of February 8th, students will see a presentation by the adjustment counselors that explains the options and requirements for classes next year at Shrewsbury High School. They will receive a course catalog and class registration form after February Vacation.

As part of the course placement process, students will be taking placement tests in these subjects:

- Math - Friday, February 8th
- World Languages - Wednesday, February 9th & 10th (French and Spanish)
- Also, in ELA, students will be filling out [a short form](#) on which they will explain which level they feel they have earned. Honors candidates are encouraged to [type their response](#) and submit it through the Assessment Collector, as a formal persuasive piece of writing. Demos are available for students to view, if they come by Mr. Pizzuto's room. This form / writing piece will be part of a discussion between your child and Mr. Pizzuto during the level placement process.

Please understand that placements are based on measurable criteria -- grades in our classes, combined with key habits of mind -- work completion and timeliness, frequency of needing retakes, etc. We cannot place students based on what we think they can do -- that being said, if you disagree with a placement, there will be an opportunity for you to discuss the placement with the educator and, if necessary, you and your child will be able to meet with the educator, department chair, and adjustment counselor to review your child's portfolio.

Class Updates

ELA:

We are currently wrapping up our science fiction unit -- students have chosen their essay topics and gathered their evidence, and will be drafting the paper over the next week. They should have a full draft by next Wednesday, and **the essay is due through Google Classroom by the end of class on Friday**, February 5th. I encourage you to check in with your child during this process; have them show you the support materials that are available in Google Classroom, and the work they have completed.

Additionally, **we are kicking off a combined ELA / social studies unit this Thursday** -- a research project which will focus on the feudal system that existed in England in the early 1300s. This week, students will be selecting topics and reviewing the key unit materials. Next week, in social studies, they will begin their research. Students will take notes primarily in Noodle Tools, although those who wish to take notes on paper or in a Google document / spreadsheet will be welcome to do so. Next week, social studies will be dedicated to research, while we finish our Sci Fi paper in ELA. Once we head into February break, ELA will shift focus to the Medieval world, and completing the research paper. You can review [the research paper instructions and support materials](#) here.

Math:

This week we are wrapping up our "Looking for Pythagoras" unit. As the title suggests, we studied right triangles as we explored a famous theorem named after a greek mathematician, Pythagoras. The Pythagorean Theorem is a fundamental piece of all geometry, trigonometry and calculus. While it is important for students to be able to use the pythagorean theorem and find missing side lengths of triangles, in class problems and activities have also stressed the derivation of the theorem and why it works. I am

looking for students to display a depth of understanding and fluency in skills with right triangles. Since students have needed to be able to calculate square roots when working with the Pythagorean Theorem, they have also learned the difference between rational and irrational numbers. Our Unit Test is scheduled for this Friday, January 29th. Next week, students will also complete a short writing assignment related to the Pythagorean Theorem. This assignment is the first assessment this trimester of students' ability to communicate their mathematical thinking clearly and concisely.

Looking forward, our next unit is "Butterflies, Pinwheels, and Wallpaper." In this unit students will explore symmetry and transformations on the coordinate plane. Students often have an intuitive understanding of symmetry. Although students begin recognizing symmetric figures at an early age, the analytical understanding needed to confirm symmetry and to construct figures with given symmetries require greater mathematical sophistication. This unit helps students to refine their knowledge of symmetry and to use it to make mathematical arguments.

As always, if students are struggling at any point please encourage them to see me for an extra help session.

Science:

We have concluded our Chemistry unit and will be learning introductory Physics concepts and skills for the remainder of the year. We are currently in our unit on "Describing and Graphing Motion". Students ran the 40 yard dash last week and compared their average speeds to NFL athletes. Students are currently working on a graphing motion investigation. They are using Vernier motion probes, cars/ramps, simulations/games, and their own bodies to learn how motion is represented on a "distance-time graph".

Social Studies:

Students are about to embark on a ELA/SS research paper examining the various characteristics of European Feudalism. Independent research, formal research skills and a very good understanding of another place and time are areas of focus. How a society functions is the backbone of the paper. Students will be able to use their research paper to assist them in an upcoming S/S unit assessment. The unit will conclude with a fun hands on learning activity that involves the building of medieval model structures. Upon completion, these models will be displayed in the school media center.

Learning Skills:

Students participating in Learning Skills class have been previewing components of the research paper prior to the kick off which will be this week in ELA and Social Studies. A model outline, terminology to research and vocabulary that will need to be incorporated into their research papers has been shown and discussed with the students.

Additionally, support has been provided to complete persuasive writing essays and review the Pythagorean Theorem in preparation for the upcoming unit assessment.

During the second trimester focus continues to be placed on self advocacy. Students in the small group will begin to have more opportunities to determine the areas which they would like to work on in preparation for assessments and assignments. Students are expected to come in with questions and their materials. This model is more similar to the one used at the high school. Students who may need more structure will continue to receive the support and direction needed to complete assignments.

We wish you health and happiness in 2016... please let us know if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions!

8 Gold Team Teachers